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Honoring the Legacy of Navy Nurses Worldwide

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By Rear Adm. Rebecca McCormick-Boyle, commander, Navy Medicine Education and Training Command and director, U.S. Navy Nurse Corps



Navy Nurse Corps POWs pose with Vice Adm. Thomas C. Kincaid, Commander of 7th Fleet and Southwest Pacific Force, after their rescue from Los Banos, Feb. 23, 1945. They were imprisoned Jan. 6, 1942 while stationed in the Philippines.

Editors note: The following was originally posted on [Naval History & Heritage's Naval History Blog](#).

January 6 commemorates the 72nd anniversary of one of the most tragic, yet heroic and triumphant moments in Navy Nurse Corps history.

On that date in 1942, 11 Navy Nurses and three civilian nurses were taken prisoner by Japanese forces in the Philippines. During their 37-month imprisonment

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these nurses – known as the “Band of Angels” – continued to care for the sick and injured despite the fact they suffered from their own malnutrition and disease. They were liberated in February 1945.

Throughout World War II, Navy Nurses served at 40 naval hospitals, 176 dispensaries, and on board 12 hospital ships. They earned over 300 military awards

and honors for their efforts.

From the proud and humble beginnings of the first Navy Nurses, [“The Sacred Twenty”](#) to today’s force of more 4,000, Navy Nurses are committed to duty and heroic sacrifice in the service of our country. Navy Nurses have set the highest standards for our profession since its inception, and we continue to carry the banner of that proud legacy.

Today, we continue this proud tradition of selfless service at home and around the globe, at military treatment facilities (MTFs), ambulatory care centers, research facilities, education and training commands, and a broad range of operational settings. Navy Nurses are also at the forefront of joint operations, serving alongside health care providers from our sister services and with allied forces medical teams. Paying homage to the “Band of Angels,” I would be remiss if I did not highlight our continued presence and commitment to our mission in the Pacific, where Navy Nurses are on call and ready to support humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions, as well as annual partnership missions like Pacific Partnership. We are a team of professionals who serve with one overall mission: to provide the best possible care for our patients.

This charge to care both on and off the battlefield is truly a calling, not just a career. It’s a calling to deliver competent and compassionate nursing care whenever and wherever we are needed. For many patients, the first person they see when they open their eyes after surgery, illness, or an injury is their Navy Nurse. No matter where they are serving, Navy Nurses stand ready at bedsides around the globe and are a vital force in any setting.

I am humbled by our Navy Nurses who are recognized for bravery, heroism, and leadership throughout our naval history. From the proud and modest beginnings of the first Navy Nurses and the “Band of Angels” to today’s force of nurses, our professional Nurse Corps waves the banner of our Navy legacy – providing caring, compassionate, and competent care, anytime, anywhere.

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